

VANISH VOICE

Winter 2023



CEO Charlotte Smith, filming for ABC Compass

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Message from Charlotte

Dear members and friends,

I hope you have been keeping well. Spring is in the air and we have been enjoying a few warmer days here in Melbourne. Spring is known as the season of hope and we are certainly in a state of anticipation as we await announcements from the Victorian Government regarding the implementation of the Inquiry recommendations, including a redress scheme for mothers and Integrated Birth Certificates for adoptees. We do not have any updates on these matters yet, but this newsletter is packed full of news, member contributions and upcoming events so I hope you enjoy reading it.

Since our last newsletter we have had a lot of media coverage, particularly the ABC Compass program "Hidden Children" which I was interviewed for. It was about Brendan Watkins who discovered he is the son of a priest (see pages 3 and 6). Since the program aired we have received a lot of enquiries from adopted people who know or think they are children of priests, so the momentum is building and we hope they will receive acknowledgement and justice. VANISH is also featured in the new podcast on LiSTNR by journalist Amelia Oberhardt who interviews a range of people including Sue Green and me, as she takes a deep dive into past and forced adoptions (see p3).

The VANISH AGM is on 22nd September (see p2) which fortunately coincides with Scottish mother and campaigner Jeannot Farmer being in Australia. Jeannot will present on how the Scottish apology came about and her hopes for the future. Jeannot will also attend the mothers art therapy course (see back cover) while she is here. There will also be a special resolution at our AGM to change the VANISH Rules. See page 13 for more information.

Our other exciting announcement is that thanks to some funding from the Victorian Government, we are able to offer the VANISH Training for Professionals again. This is a one-day training for health, mental health and allied health workers, and a two-day training for counsellors. There are 10 subsidised spaces on offer for counsellors who are eligible and available to join our counsellor register so if you are interested, get in quick!

As always, we welcome your feedback about this newsletter and our services and also your contributions for our next edition in December. If we have any updates before then we will put out a bulletin.

All the best,

Charlotte Smith

CEO

Dates for Your Calendar

VANISH Annual General Meeting
Friday 22nd September (see p2)

Mothers Art Therapy Course
5th October to 9th November (see back cover)

Commemoration of the Anniversary of the Victorian
Parliamentary Apology for Past Adoption Practices:
Saturday 21st October (see p13)

VANISH training for Professionals
13th & 14th November (see p12)

Support group dates can be found on the back page

The VANISH Team

Charlotte Smith
Chief Executive Officer

Gail Holstock
Support Services Coordinator

Patricia Navaretti
Tracey Hudson
SallyRose Carbines
Adelaide Tapper
Search & Support Workers

Lorna Sleightholm
Administrator

Hana Crisp
Program Support Officer

VANISH Annual General Meeting

You are invited to our AGM

Friday 22nd September 2023 4pm - 6pm

Radisson on Flagstaff Gardens Hotel, 380 William St, Melbourne

Guest speaker: Jeannot Farmer



The Scottish Adoption Apology: Tackling Historic Adoption Injustice

Jeannot is a Scottish mother and campaigner whose son was taken at birth without notice or consent in 1979, when she was 22. She belongs to a group of mothers who successfully negotiated with politicians and officials of the Scottish government to deliver a formal national apology in March of this year *"To the mothers who had their babies taken away from them; to the sons and the daughters who were separated from their parents; to the fathers who were denied their rights, and to the families who have lived with the legacy."*

Jeannot is visiting Australia on a Churchill Fellowship to look at the impact of the Australian National Apology in 2013 and implementation of the Senate Inquiry recommendations. Her presentation on the journey to the Scottish apology and her hopes for the next steps will be followed by a discussion and Q&A.

and

Special Resolution: Changes to VANISH Inc's Rules

The VANISH Committee of Management will propose a motion to change the Rules for VANISH Inc., to include adult children of adopted persons into its membership categories, to change the COM composition in line with the new categories and to clarify and modernise the language. A summary of changes can be found on page 13.

Light refreshments will be provided

RSVP: by email info@vanish.org.au or phone (03) 9328 8611 by **Friday 8th September**

Location: Radisson Hotel, Corner of William St and A'Beckett St

Parking: Meters on A'Beckett St, Franklin St, and William St (north of Dudley St).

Train: Flagstaff train station (William St / La Trobe St exit)

Trams: 58 (stop 7), 30 and 35 (stop 3)

Voting by Proxy: If you are eligible to vote and unable to attend but would like to vote by proxy, please contact us for proxy forms. Proxy votes must be received no less than 24 hours before the meeting.



News & Updates



Hidden Children on ABC TV's Compass

When adoptee Brendan Watkins searched for his parents, he discovered that his mother was a nun and his father a priest. Award-winning journalist Suzanne Smith covered the story of the children of priests and their struggle for justice for ABC TV's Compass (13 Aug 2023), including an interview with VANISH CEO Charlotte Smith.

Watch the episode online on ABC Iview: <https://iview.abc.net.au/show/compass/series/37/video/RN221H022S00>

Read the accompanying article by Suzanne Smith: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-08-13/children-catholic-priests-search-truth-justice-secrets/102706050>

Read VANISH's interview with Brendan on pages 6 & 7.



Image from National Archives of Australia via ABC Listen

ABC Radio National reflects on forced adoption's legacy

ABC Radio National's Life Matters recently broadcast an episode (7 August 2023) presented by Hilary Harper reflecting on the 10th anniversary of the national apology for forced adoptions, featuring calls from people affected - many of whom are still waiting for justice.

Hilary interviews journalist Amelia Oberhardt (see opposite) and Jo Sparrow from Jigsaw Queensland.

Listen to the episode online on ABC Listen: <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/lifematters/the-dark-legacy-of-forced-adoption/102614598>



A Magdalene laundry in Sydney on ABC's The History Listen

Magdalene Laundries date back to 12th century Europe. These were Catholic-run institutions to reform so called "wayward" women, known as Magdalens, through strict religious observance and hard work.

In Ireland, shocking revelations have come to light about the conditions these women endured. But Donna Abela found that a Magdalene laundry once existed in Australia too - near her home in Tempe, Sydney. Donna goes in search of Tempe's Missing Magdalens. She stumbles across a hidden story and reveals a very personal one of her own.

Listen to the episode online on ABC Listen: <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/the-history-listen/the-history-listen-magdalene-laundry-tempe-catholic/102620008>



Secrets We Keep: New podcast out now

Brisbane journalist Amelia Oberhardt spent nearly a year looking into the adoption practices of 1950s - 70s Australia after discovering a photo of her mother before she was born, holding a baby.

The series covers a range of issues affecting women in that period as well as past and forced adoption policies and practices. Season One features interviews with VANISH CEO Charlotte Smith and clinical psychologist and VANISH training facilitator Dr Sue Green.

Listen here: <https://play.listnr.com/podcast/secrets-we-keep>

News & Updates



Jigsaw WA calls for adoption redress scheme for mothers, fathers and adoptees

In its submission to the WA Inquiry into past forced adoptive policies and practices, Jigsaw WA, which has been supporting people affected by forced adoption since 1978, has called for all parties (mothers, fathers and adoptees) to be offered redress, which would be a national first.

Read the full article by ABC News reporter Claire Moodie here: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-08-12/charity-demands-adoption-redress-scheme/102719036>

Calls for Chair of WA Inquiry to step down due to surrogacy

The chair of a parliamentary committee looking into past forced adoption practices in WA is facing calls from a group of adoptee campaigners to step down from the inquiry.

It's been revealed Peter Foster – a WA politician who chairs the state's Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs – used an overseas commercial surrogate to have a child.

Read the full article here: <https://articles.listnr.com/news/head-of-forced-adoption-inquiry-faces-mounting-pressure-to-step-down/>

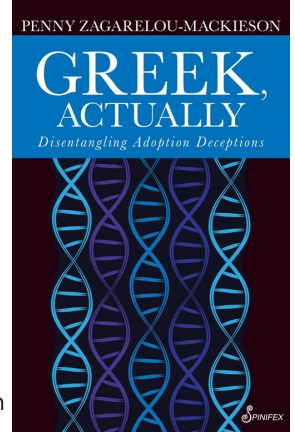
Peter Capomolla Moore wins six-year legal fight to add his father's name to his birth certificate

A New South Wales tribunal has ruled in favour of 65-year-old late discovery adoptee Peter Capomolla Moore, allowing him to have his late father listed on his birth certificate, despite not having direct DNA evidence to support it.

Read the full story by Claire Moodie for ABC News here: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-08-06/man-wins-six-year-legal-fight-for-birth-certificate/102678250>

Greek, Actually: A new book from Penny Zagarelou-Mackieson

Penny Zagarelou-Mackieson always knew she was adopted. But she didn't know she was swapped at birth. After a lifetime grappling with issues of identity and belonging, Penny discovered that her natural mother named in her records, was genetically unrelated to her and she was Greek, not Celtic-Anglo as she was led to believe.



Penny's quest to uncover the truth ultimately leads her to terminate her adoption order and confront the human rights violations inherent in adoption.

Greek, Actually: Disentangling Adoption Deceptions will be released in October (2023) and is available for pre-order directly from the publisher, Spinifex Press: <https://www.spinifexpress.com.au/shop/p/9781925950793>

Penny will be speaking at a free author talk hosted by the Monash Public Library Service.

When: Tuesday 31 October 2023, from 7 to 8pm

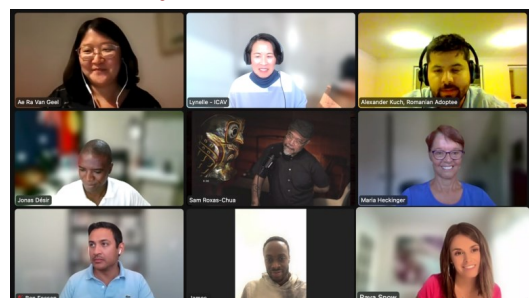
Where: Wheelers Hill Library, 860 Ferntree Gully Rd, Wheelers Hill VIC

Register here: www.trybooking.com/CKAKA

New resources for search and reunion in intercountry adoption

InterCountry Adoptee Voices (ICAV) has recently released two new resources :

- A perspective paper on searching, featuring lived experiences from 26 intercountry adoptees from around the world. Available for download here: <https://intercountryadopteevoices.com/adoptee-voices/perspective-papers/>
- A webinar on reunion and beyond, featuring 9 intercountry adoptees. Watch the recording here: <https://intercountryadopteevoices.com/2023/08/14/reunion-and-beyond-webinar/>



News & Updates



Heather Kinang

A podcast for
anyone affected
by adoption.



Late discovery adoptee Heather Kinang on Adopt Perspective podcast

Season 4, Episode 6 of Jigsaw QLD's Adopt Perspective podcast features Heather Kinang, a Himalayan climber, trekker, yoga teacher, espresso lover and late discovery adoptee.

The episode is a thought-provoking listen and a useful resource for anyone affected by adoption but especially for late discovery adoptees.

You can listen to the Adopt Perspective podcast on all main podcast platforms and on the Jigsaw QLD website: <https://www.jigsawqueensland.com/podcast>



“Dovetails”: a personal essay by E.J. Clarence

The Summer 2022 edition of the Overland literary journal features a personal essay by adopted person E.J. Clarence. ‘Dovetails’ is a first-person account of E.J.’s experiences and the ways in which adoption has touched a whole family of people’s lives.

E.J. is an emerging writer exploring the long narrative arc of Forced Adoption through Own Voices fiction, poetry, prose and personal essays which acknowledge the tenth anniversary of Julia Gillard’s National Apology.

You can read the full essay here: <https://overland.org.au/previous-issues/issue-249/feature-dovetails/>



Genealogy article on Korean adoption to Australia

Approximately 3600 Korean children have been adopted to Australia. Whereas existing studies have tended to approach transnational adoption from child development, social welfare, or identity perspectives, the current article situates adoption practices within the socio-political contexts and larger migration trends of both countries. Authors Jay Song and Ryan Gustafsson identify multiple enabling factors for the ‘quiet’ flow of Korean children for adoption and argue the very ‘quietness’ of the adoption system is a source of concern.

You can read the full article here: <https://www.mdpi.com/2313-5778/7/2/40>



Intercountry Adoptee and Family Support Service (ICAFSS) Seeks Mentors

The Intercountry Adoptee and Family Support Service (icafss.org.au) is currently seeking expressions of interests from potential mentors to support young intercountry adoptees (aged 7-17) through fun group activities (e.g., culturally specific cooking classes, therapeutic creative workshops, rock-climbing, bowling, and wildlife park visits). Please note this is a volunteer role.

Who can apply? Intercountry adoptees and people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds are encouraged to apply. People who have been locally adopted (born and adopted in Australia) will also be considered. Applications from all states and territories are welcome.

If you are interested in becoming a mentor, please email Jane at j.sliwka@rasa.org.au to discuss further.

Author Interview



Brendan with VANISH staff member Hana

“People need to know about it”:

Author and adoptee Brendan Watkins calls for a national inquiry into the hidden children of priests

As most VANISH members would know, searching for one's natural parents can be a long and difficult process, with unexpected revelations along the way. But when Brendan Watkins started his search 30 years ago, no one could have predicted what he would ultimately discover: his parents were a Catholic priest and nun.

Brendan arrives early for our interview at the VANISH office, a tall, striking figure dressed in Melbourne black. It's two days after the release of his memoir *Tell No One*, which he celebrated with a book launch at a pub in Richmond, around the corner from where he grew up with his adoptive parents, Roy and Bet, and brother Damien. How does he feel now that the book is out? “I don't know,” he says. “I feel as though my feet haven't touched the ground since.”

Adopted in 1961, Brendan's search was initially motivated by a desire to

know his medical history, prompted by plans to start a family with his partner Kate, who had inherited a rare medical disorder. After applying to Community Services Victoria, he was directed to the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau, who, as Brendan has since learned, “saw itself as the protector of the mother *from* the child.” Brendan's social worker, cold and foreboding, reluctantly contacted his mother on his behalf after Brendan's insistence. Several weeks later, Brendan rushed back to her office, only to be told: “You'll never see or talk to your mother. Go home, forget about it forever.” In a recent interview for ABC Compass, Brendan said: “It's the most wounding, impactful trauma of my life. I've only just realised that.”

After his dealings with the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau, Brendan turned to VANISH. “VANISH was just fantastic. It was a beacon of light in all of this secret, controlling sense of the church,” he says. “Everyone [at

VANISH] was busy and run off their feet, but it was all about, *So what do you need? What do you need to 'close the book'?*”

With some encouragement from VANISH, Brendan wrote to his mother directly, but she replied saying that they would never meet in person, rejecting him for a second time. For the next thirty years, Brendan had limited communication with his mother and knew nothing about his father—until, in 2018, a DNA test led him to the truth: he was the son of a celebrated outback missionary priest, Father Vin Shiel.

Brendan points out that the actual search process was long and exhausting, unlike the somewhat compressed version in the book. “I kept wanting to go back to the well, but there were long gaps, you know, like years. And you just eventually hit a wall. You know, a dead end.”

Ultimately, Brendan may never have found both of his parents, nor maintained contact with his mother, without the help of his partner Kate – who Brendan calls “the true hero of the story.”

“There were lots of times when she was just so exhausted by it. And she was running into brick walls and dead ends along the way, and she’d put it down and walk away from it, but because of all the bits she’d found – with my mother, she had sort of found all these electoral roll records and addresses and all this stuff that I thought was totally irrelevant, but it ended up being critical to finding her.”

After finding the identity of his father, who had since passed away, Brendan quit his job and devoted the next five years to researching his father’s life and talking to other children of priests and mothers of the children of priests, as well as lawyers, psychologists, barristers, professors, and social workers. He was driven to both piece together the truth of his ancestry and expose the secrecy and abuse of the church. “I felt as though I couldn’t really rest until I understood, or at least imagined [everything that happened],” Brendan says. “The book was about gathering every conceivable bit of information together and laying it out and trying to understand what happened.”

The result, *Tell No One*, is a compelling read – eloquently crafted, insightful, and surprisingly humorous at times. During the writing process, his lifelong journalling practice came in handy, both in developing writing skills and providing accurate details of significant events. “Virtually every bit of that book has been in journals, and because you see all the twists and turns, I was able to go back and pull out things that have happened.”

The process of research and writing also enabled Brendan to become closer to both of his natural parents. The more he learned about mothers of the children of priests, he was struck by their common circumstances: often a much younger woman with no financial resources, limited education and career opportunities, and no family support. In other words, someone

with no choices. Further, the women were often parishioners who saw priests as the embodiment of God on earth, sworn to secrecy.

Eventually, Brendan discovered that his natural parents were actually living together when he first contacted his mother 30 years ago. He writes openly about the pain of her initial rejections and the lies (including a false name for his father that sent him on a two-year wild goose chase), but with compassion. “I think I say it in the book: You know, I can’t ever love her. But I can forgive her. And I feel enormous sympathy for her,” he says. “And in truth, I probably would have done the same thing, had it been me. So, I get it.”

His father, Father Vin Shiel, is also portrayed with compassion and nuance. Thanks to a progressive archbishop, Brendan obtained his father’s file, containing hundreds of letters written and received by Vin. “I heard his voice,” Brendan says. “You sort of hear between the lines—his attitudes and his inklings and his thinking, and it allowed me the opportunity to sort of create in my mind those chapters that were through Vin’s eyes or viewing Vin.”

Poring over the letters was a cathartic process for Brendan, allowing some insight into the complex man who was a builder, a Bondi Lifesaver, and a trophy-winning ballroom dancer before becoming a priest and touring the world. But Brendan is the only child of a priest that he knows of who has been given his father’s file. “It only infuriates me more to know that I’ve got it,” says Brendan. “And there’s thousands of children and priests around the world that the church still won’t recognize, even though they’ve got a whole bunch of evidence [of paternity]. They’re just at arm’s length. And they have similar information about their fathers.”

This is Brendan’s real mission in publishing this book: to shine a light on the issue of hidden children of priests and expose the hypocrisy of the church. In one study, former priest and researcher Richard Sipe reported that less than half of a sample of 1,500 Catholic priests in the US attempt celibacy. Given that there are 450,000 Catholic priests around the world, it is estimated

that they have fathered at least 20,000 children.

Both the children (only some of whom are adopted) and mothers suffer severe psychological consequences, burdened by shame and church silencing. In one survey of 100 children of priests, 56% of participants had either attempted suicide or had suicidal ideation. Of further concern, there is nowhere for these people to go. “This is a really specific, niche group,” says Brendan.

Now Brendan is calling for an independent, secular inquiry from the federal government. He hopes that the book and his decision to go public with his story will help the issue gain traction, but he’s also aware of the difficulty for other victims in coming forward—particularly for believers—and the fickle, fast-paced media cycle. “It might all go away [in the media] ...but if there’s a couple of other people that read it, and they’re the mother or they’re the child, and it starts a conversation, and someone hears the truth...they might turn the corner,” he says.

“If it does something good, it does something good. Certainly not going to get rich writing a book,” Brendan laughs. “But I’m glad I’ve told my story.”

Brendan’s book [Tell No One](#) is published by Allen & Unwin and available from all good retailers.

For a list of associations & agencies for children of priests and their mothers, visit Brendan’s website: www.brendanwatkins.com.au/children-of-priests

Brendan will be speaking at a free author talk hosted by the Monash Public Library Service.

When: Thursday 2 November 2023, from 7 to 8pm

Where: Wheelers Hill Library, 860 Ferntree Gully Rd, Wheelers Hill VIC

Register here: www.trybooking.com/CJYDE

Member Contributions



Art Therapy for Adoptees with Michele Hutchins: A Personal Reflection

By Frances-Juliet (Julie)

It is Week 6 and our group gathers warmly for the last time. Today we eagerly head straight to the materials so generously set out for us, curious about what the final 'Tree of life' painting will reveal...

...

Over the past six weeks, we have been located in a space so inviting, safe and supportive, in ways that help us to attune more deeply to ourselves, the creative process, and each other. We have been nurtured and given tools for self-care.

We have come together with common ground as adoptees, but with diverse experiences of what that means. Though 'family' can sometimes be a fraught word, I sense a 'familiarity' here that is comfortable and engaging. Our warm finely informed facilitator is also an adoptee.

We introduce ourselves by selecting an image that 'says something' about us. Instant relief – a creative tone is set! No recitation is required of our complicated origins and identities. Whatever we wish to share of this, and of anything, will unfold organically over time. Some of us may still feel close sensory connections to preverbal states, and especially in this context, it's rich to access other means of expression besides the verbal at times. Significant things, for anyone, may sometimes also be 'beyond words'.

With my image of a dead tree in a desert, I say that I have been trudging on, 'stuck' for so long in creative and other ways, and yearning for renewal. I add that from childhood I loved the soothing sensation of a crayon gliding over paper, the magical colours 'singing' together, so I knew 'art' didn't have to be about 'getting it right' or being selected for display to matter deeply.

In turn others share their images. Our witnessing is frequently so resonant and moving.

We listen and learn and share. We know no external interpretations will be imposed on anything we produce. Over these weeks, with different materials we will explore and 'play' with processes and themes. There is much opportunity to listen to deeper parts of self while attending to what is evoked, as sensations, feelings, memories, thoughts, and even questions arise. We can rearrange and even evict aspects of our work, or change its course and perhaps ponder how





some of these perceptions and transformations may have relevance in our lives beyond here.

One time I make 'nests' for some forms and viscerally experience a 'letting go' when I then gently place them out for the earth to reclaim. I can do no more in this situation and with what they represent. Another time I find a soft concealed place to hold and keep a painful un-lived desire. I feel consoled. Even our imaginary experiences happen in our bodies to some degree - as we visualise them, they tense, relax and can be changed. Often, I don't know what is forming from interacting with the materials or try to direct it. It may reveal things later. Meanwhile, creative flow and time has its own healings and benefits - like tactile enjoyment and the satisfaction of making and being creative—as we all are, in some way.

We sit companionably together, immersed in our own work, but aware and encouraging of one another. There are occasional remarks, delighted or "ah hah" sounds, or a soft sigh or "scrape" or "thump" or "smoothing". Sometimes there's appropriate music, or soft quiet. Michele is totally unobtrusively present and available for any (including practical) matters as we create. She

holds the space and keeps the time and is deeply attuned to each of us and the group as a whole. This assists us to move into the creative flow, explore, and flourish there.

Afterwards, prompted by a few astute questions, we journal a little. This helps us to notice our work from different perspectives, and to find words that bring another layer of consciousness to our primary creative processes, and help us to then better communicate and share a little together. Sometimes the words arrive as beautiful prose poems. Bonus! The sharing aids further clarity and insights. A work I referred to as "A

Complicated Mess" glowed a little from some astute observations shared (though still not aesthetically). Isolation fades! Portrayals of our separations, severings, griefs, reunions, endurances, and joys are all acceptable subject matter here. The exchanges help and can resonate with how we navigate what life has given us.

...

So now it's time. My final work "The Tree of Life" is complete. I notice so much in it that is vital and alive and so informative to me. The sun and moon shimmer through it - there is an 'alchemy' I comprehend that I am not walking through a desert anymore. I pause as I realise that whatever (rich) associations I make with aspects of it, I have created my own authentic tree story.

Maybe I can feel less often like that chameleon child, adapting and placating to survive.

Maybe I can even still thrive and be a bit fruitful in my own flexible tree-like way.

Finally, resurfacing from my own deep process, I move through our hall. There is a forest all around! It has grown from the seeds of our deep work here. Each precious tree is so unique and yet they are all resonating together, as I am, internally, with each one. It is an awesome forest sanctuary, and I am so profoundly affected.

And as we come full circle and close, with each choosing to 'say something' this time about the images we have ourselves created, I am so utterly grateful to Michele, to each dear group member, and to Hana and all at VANISH who have made this journey possible to partake in, and from which to move out towards fresh possibilities.

Namaste!

Frances-Juliet (Julie)



This workshop was funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services through Relationships Australia Victoria's Forced Adoption Support Service.

"Be still, my heart, these great trees are prayers." - Tagore (from Julie)

Members' Feedback

Writing As Therapy for Mothers with Dr Sian Prior

I had initially planned to rearrange my work schedule to attend 2 of the 4 sessions, but after the first one I went to greater lengths to make sure I could get to all of them, and I'm so glad I did.

The sessions only went for 2 hours each, but it was incredible how much Sian was able to pack into that short amount of time, how easy it was to listen to her and understand some of these new aspects of writing, and how empowering it can be just by putting pen to paper.

Sian's depth of knowledge and her willingness to share her own personal experiences created a space where I was surprisingly keen, at every opportunity, to share some of my pieces, and my homework, with our small group. I was even excited each time Sian announced we had homework (that is if we chose to, there were certainly no expectations).

It was as if Sian gave me a key that unlocked an infinite space where I can place all of my deepest fears and emotions, and where I'm learning I can take charge of them. The freedom I feel I'm gaining from that is immeasurable.

- Sheryl

How to Write a Memoir Webinar also with Sian

After the popular Writing As Therapy workshops VANISH organised, a few of participants told us they want to write a memoir so we decided to ask Sian Prior to share her expertise in a webinar which she kindly did.

The session was compered by Susan Thomas who, apart from being an adopted person and VANISH member, is a Librarian at Wheelers Hill Library who hosts author interviews with adoption and donor conception themes.

It was a rich and thought-provoking session and we had some wonderful feedback afterwards.

"Dear Folks and all involved in bringing the webinar together,

I tuned in from the UK after relocating this year back to my birth country for the purpose of writing.

I found Sian's presentation excellent, inspiring and easy to follow. I am determined now more than ever to commence serious writing after making notes for many years.

Vanish you were instrumental in me finding my birth Mum and now you have been instrumental in me feeling confident enough to document it.

Thanks to all once again."

- Elaine

Members' Stories

Never say never: how I met my mother

I first found out I was adopted at about the age of 30, when Mum and Dad were compelled to tell me by circumstance. Hence, I didn't feel I could pursue my original birth story until both had passed away. It was the mid-1990s when I found the good people at VANISH, who quickly discovered my birth mother and sent her a message I was looking for her.

Unfortunately, my birth all those years prior had created a rift in her family, with little support and a ghastly outlook for a frightened 19-year-old girl. My birth father never knew of the pregnancy. So, for me to

pop back onto the scene after all this time was not a welcomed surprise. Indeed, my mother's then-husband had no idea of this story and she had no intention of raising it. So, after one brief, secret and tense phone call, we would not speak again for over 25 years.

Every time we moved, I sent her a discreet note to let her know where we were going, just in case she ever felt like she could engage with me. I never heard anything. Finally, in 2022, my wife and I saw the SBS Insight program about adoption and I made contact with VANISH once more to see what they would counsel. One of their saintly support workers, SallyRose, saw my email and called me to share her story. She gave me the courage and advice to try once more. Without her help, I probably wouldn't have been emboldened.

I nervously composed a small card to my mother and just a few days later, got the shock of my life when she phoned me. Immediately, the dam was broken. A few weeks later, at 66, I finally met my mother and, subsequently, two of my half-brothers.

The two lessons I've learned are: you can't enter a situation like this fixated only on your own hopes and emotional needs; and, if you employ gentleness, love, hope and humility, there is always a chance of reunion. Always.

Thank you, VANISH.

From PJS.

Members' Stories



I am more than ok!

More than 10 years ago, I wrote a piece for the VANISH Newsletter titled 'I'm not ok with it'. It laid bare the pain and emptiness I was feeling with my birth mother cutting me out of her life yet again. A sense of re abandonment and not being seen, heard, and respected as my questions around her relationship with my birthfather and his identity remained unanswered. Back then, I felt alone, stuck and fragmented despite the amazing support I had received from VANISH. Without knowing the full story of how I came to be in this world, how could I feel 'whole'? As the ads for Ancestry.com state, 'How can you know where you are going if you don't know where you came from?' or something like that. I firmly believed that was true and considered doing a DNA test to try and put the puzzle together myself, but that was not ultimately the path I wanted to take. I needed to release myself from all of this mental torment that was pervading my whole life. I listened to my gut and chose the path that was right for me. The path to healing, forgiveness, and acceptance. I was already suffering with Fibromyalgia (A chronic pain and fatigue syndrome) as a result of the 'perfect storm' of chronic stress and emotional pain on top of adverse childhood events, that can predispose one to chronic illness. If I was to see an improvement in my health, I needed to let go of the anger and resentment I felt towards my birthmother and find another route to discovering 'who I am' and my purpose for existing on this Earth.

My healing journey started when I reached out to my Yoga teacher about my difficulties feeling 'grounded' and struggling with

meditation. I shared my story and accepted an invitation to try RTT (Rapid transformational therapy). RTT is a hybrid therapy developed by British therapist Marisa Peer. It combines the most beneficial principles of hypnotherapy, NLP, Psychotherapy and Cognitive Behavioral therapy. Over many months, I gradually began to reframe and move beyond the limiting beliefs I had particularly around my self-worth, confidence, relationships with myself and others. In combination with Yoga Nidra and Restorative Yoga practices I started to calm my dysregulated nervous system and move beyond the stress state into that of 'calm and connect'. I had been seeing a psychologist on and off for several years and although I needed that support it was not ultimately going to lead me to where I can happily say I am now. RTT involves listening to an audio of the sessions daily, creating new neural pathways in the mind, tapping into the subconscious. I also needed to slowly untangle the 'trauma' held within the tissues of my body. During a session with my holistic massage therapist, the 'armour' that I had placed around my heart to protect myself began to release as I could literally feel the energetic vibration spreading from my heart space. Since then, I have continued to peel back the layers and connect with my true self, my essence. This goes beyond how I came into this world; it is much deeper and has allowed me to feel connected to 'everything' and reclaim my birthright. To me, connecting with nature and 'Mother Earth' has also been transformational. We are nature. We are not separate from it and we can embrace our part in it.

I still experience Fibromyalgia and have to manage my energy levels, but I am so much better than I was. It is an ongoing process, and I also accept that the 'primal wound' will always be a part of me, but it no longer defines me. I feel free and believe I am here for a reason. I can give and receive love and even hold space for others on their healing journey. I have cultivated a sense of compassion for myself, my birth mother and even my birth father to whom my existence remains undisclosed.

For all this, I am truly grateful.

I identified Yoga as a path I wanted to follow and share with others and undertook Yoga teacher training over the subsequent 2 years.

With a background in Physiotherapy, last year I stepped out on my own as a Holistic Physio and Yoga teacher, starting my own business.

I am proud of how far I have come. I literally feel 'reborn' and am excited about what the future has in store for me. Full of infinite possibility.

The time felt right to share this and perhaps in some small way may give some hope to others that are struggling with their adoption experience. This has not been a linear path, with plenty of challenges. I acknowledge that as an adoptee to have even met my birth mother, is something many do not get the opportunity to experience. As we all can attest to, life is messy and being adopted is another level of 'messiness'.

We are all unique, and this has been my own experience. It has taken a lot of work and has not been easy but is so worth it. I am at peace. I am more than ok.

Rebecca (Bec)

VANISH Professional Training

Working with Loss and Trauma Related to Past and Forced Adoption Practices

Training for Counsellors, Health and Welfare Professionals with Dr Sue Green

Separation from a child or mother and family through adoption has lifelong consequences which have frequently been ignored or dismissed by professionals in the past. Individuals may come with a broad range of presenting difficulties, including depression and anxiety that may be related to adoption or separation from a child.

State and Federal Apologies have now acknowledged the significant grief and trauma experienced by mothers, fathers, adopted individuals and their extended families as a result of past and forced adoption practices.

VANISH members and service users tell us there is demand for trained and skilled professionals in this sector.

VANISH has delivered this training program across Victoria and has received excellent feedback.

Day One	Day Two
Supporting individuals experiencing separation and loss through past and forced adoption practices.	Counselling individuals experiencing separation and loss through past adoption practices.
Designed for: A broad range of professionals in the health and community sector such as GP's, nurses, drug and alcohol workers, community support workers, case managers and counsellors who may come into contact with individuals experiencing separation and loss as a result of past and forced adoption practices.	Designed for: Counsellors, psychotherapists, social workers and psychologists who may work with individuals experiencing separation and loss as a result of past and forced adoption practices and who are registered with a recognised professional association and undertake regular supervision and professional development.
Learning Outcomes <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Recognise the context and impact of past adoption practices.2. Engage empathically with individuals separated by adoption.3. Identify the effects, loss and possible expressions of grief and trauma.4. Provide support to individuals and identify potential resources for healing and growth.	Learning Outcomes <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Identify personal and systemic issues related to the complexities of adoption and the effects of grief and trauma.2. Draw on a range of counselling and therapeutic approaches to support adaptive recovery.3. Work with three unique areas of adoption complexity: the 'late discovery' of adoption status, the re-emergence of trauma and grief responses during search and contact, and the phenomenon of genetic sexual attraction.

“Thank you from myself and future and present clients”

“Incredibly enlightening. Learned so much, feel so much better informed”

When: Monday 13th and Tuesday 14th November 2023

Where: ANMF, Carson Conference Centre, 535 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne

Cost: Day One Only \$245.

Day One and Two \$520 (early bird rate \$490, ends 22 September)

A subsidised rate of \$380 is available for counsellors eligible for the VANISH Counsellor Register with availability to participate in our brokerage scheme (max 10 spots).

To register or find out more, please call (03) 9328 8611 or email info@vanish.org.au

Special Resolution re: VANISH Rules

At the upcoming AGM the VANISH Committee of Management (COM) will put forward a motion to change the Rules of the Association. The last time the Rules were changed was in 2013. The proposed changes are summarised below:

Vice-Chair

The COM proposes a change to the Rules to enable the Committee to appoint a Vice-Chair from time to time as and when required.

Membership categories

In line with Rule 5.1.b "*The Committee may decide to create or vary classes of membership with the same or differing rights or privileges*", in 2019 the COM changed the membership categories to include adult children of adopted people. Search and support requests and membership applications from this cohort have increased over the past decade but they were not identified in the previous categories.

The COM proposes the Rules now be updated to reflect the new categories with full voting rights which are: (1) '*offspring*'; (2) '*biological or natural parent*'; (3) '*biological or natural family*'; and (4) '*non-biological or alternative family*', and categories with no voting rights which are: (5) '*supporter*' (a person who supports VANISH and is not eligible for membership in the categories above) and (6) '*professional*' (a person with a professional interest in VANISH and not eligible for membership categories above).

COM Composition

In line with the above, the COM proposes amending the composition of the Committee in the Rules to incorporate these changes. The COM also proposes changes to the wording (inserting "in addition" to provide clarity) and numbers (to provide flexibility while still maintaining the balance of lived experience representation), as shown below. The total number of COM members will still be 6 to 12.

A minimum of 2 persons from the 'offspring' category of membership, at least one of whom must be an adopted person.

A minimum of 2 persons from the 'biological or natural parent' or the 'biological or natural family' categories of membership, at least one of whom must be a mother or father of an adopted person.

In addition, up to 4 persons from the 'offspring', 'biological or natural parent' or biological or natural family', or 'non-biological or alternative family' categories of membership.

In addition, up to 4 persons from the 'supporters' membership.

In addition, up to 4 persons who need not be members but who support the Association and who bring such relevant expertise, knowledge and skills as required by the Association.

Disciplined Members Right to Appeal

This proposed change inserts a new section about disciplined members on their right to appeal, in line with good governance principles.

Public Officer

This proposed change includes a new section on the requirement that VANISH Inc have a Public Officer. This requirement has been in place for many years but not specified in VANISH Inc's Rules.

The legal firm assisting VANISH with the proposed changes has also suggested edits which will clarify and modernise some of the language used.

Details of all proposed changes will be made available to members who RSVP that they are attending the AGM. For further information please contact Charlotte Smith, CEO using the contact details on the back of this newsletter.

SAVE THE DATE

Commemoration of the Anniversary
of the Victorian Parliamentary Apology
for Past Adoption Practices

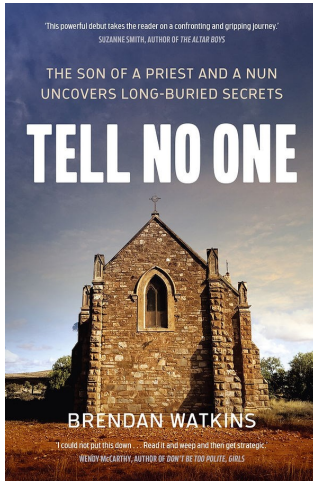
Saturday 21st October

2pm at

Taken Not Given Statue
corner of St Andrew's Place and
Lansdowne Street, East Melbourne
Everyone is welcome!

New Books in the Library

Tell No One: The son of a priest and a nun uncovers long-buried secrets



By Brendan Watkins

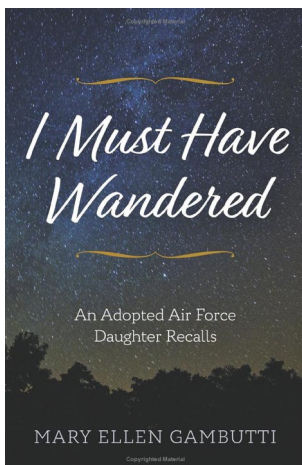
Brendan Watkins was eight years old when his parents told him he was adopted. When he was in his late twenties, he started searching for his birth parents and eventually discovered the identity of his birth mother: he was told she was a Catholic nun. And she wanted nothing to do with him. For the next thirty years Brendan had no clues as to the identity of his birth father.

In 2018, a DNA test provided the answer: he was the son of a priest. His father had studied in a Trappist monastery in Ireland, returned to Australia and become a celebrated outback missionary.

After decades of searching and obstruction from the Catholic church, the whole truth was finally exposed. *Tell No One* reveals the moving story of that incredible discovery, and explores the questions, anxieties and reflections arising from Brendan's hidden past.

Source: *Brendan's website*

I Must Have Wandered: An Adopted Air Force Daughter Recalls



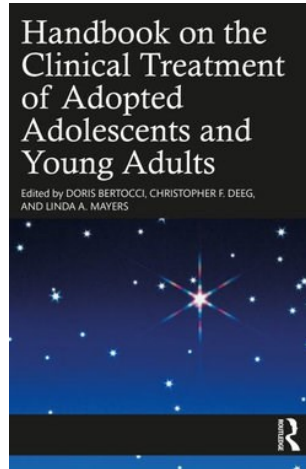
By Mary Ellen Gambutti

Through a collage of vignettes, poetry, lyrical prose, letters, fragments, and photos, Mary Ellen tells the story of her relinquishment and adoption by an Air Force couple in post-WWII South Carolina. The complexity of primal trauma, guilt, grief, and the effects of her father's intelligence officer's role lead her to a desire to learn her origins. With the help of adoptee advocates,

the barrier to her sealed birth records yields, and she embarks on a quest for her natural mother. Decades later, DNA testing leads her to a greater wealth of family, and she is closer to reconciling with the loss and privilege of her adopted life.

Source: *Amazon*

Handbook on the Clinical Treatment of Adopted Adolescents and Young Adults



Edited by D. Bertocci, C.F. Deeg, & L.A. Mayers

This collection bridges the voices of international scholars and adopted persons to share knowledge about clinical practice with adopted people in adolescence and early adulthood.

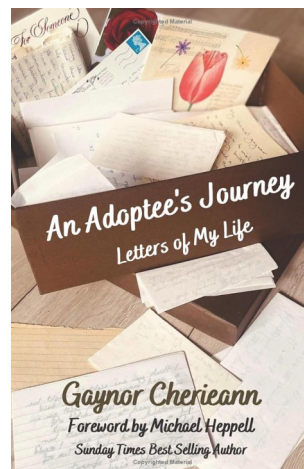
It explains how adopted clients differ from those not adopted and emphasizes the need for clinical research on adopted

people in this older age group. Exploring how clinicians can understand their client's clinical needs, it offers specific protocols and frameworks for assessment and necessary modifications in language and treatment.

Source: *Routledge*

* This handbook includes a chapter co-written by three adopted adults and professionals in different fields: Sue Green (clinical psychologist and professional trainer), Catherine Lynch (lawyer and former president of Adoptee Rights Australia), and Alison Ingram (theatre practitioner and committee member of Adoptee Rights Australia).

An Adoptee's Journey: Letters of My Life



By Gaynor Cherieann

UK adoptee Gaynor Cherieann was born to a sixteen-year-old mother in a church run mother and baby home in the UK in the 1960s and adopted at six weeks old.

In this memoir, written in the form of letters to people throughout her life, Gaynor tells of her unhappy adoption growing up with a

narcissistic parent, learning how to take control of her life after disassociating herself from her past, finding her natural family and reuniting, and becoming a mother and grandmother herself.

Source: *Amazon*

Upcoming VANISH Support Groups

All groups are for adults 18+

ALBURY

Albury Library Museum, 540 Kiewa Street

ADOPTED PERSONS 10.30am—12.30pm

November 11

MIXED GROUP 10.30am - 12.30pm

(Adopted Persons, Natural and Adoptive Parents)

September 9, December 9

BALLARAT

Eastwood Leisure Complex, 20 Eastwood Street

ADOPTED PERSONS 2pm—4pm

September 16, October 21, November 18

*Please register to reserve your place

MELBOURNE

VANISH Office, 1st Floor, 50 Howard Street,
North Melbourne

ADOPTED PERSONS 7.30—9.30pm

September 26, October 25, November 28

*Please register to reserve your place

ZOOM

ADOPTED PERSONS 6.30—8.30pm

October 11, December 13

*Please register to reserve your place

To register or for more information, please call or email us (see details below)

Free! VANISH CREATIVE EXPRESSION COURSE

For Mothers

10AM-2PM Thursdays, 5 Oct to 9 Nov 2023

In this 6-week course:

- ✓ Explore different art materials and methods each week in a safe space
- ✓ Join a community of women with similar shared experiences
- ✓ Guide your own creative journey, with no pressure to share anything unless you wish to

Location:

MacLaren Hall
45 Riversdale Road, Hawthorn

For More Info or To Register:

bit.ly/artformothers
info@vanish.org.au
(03) 9328 8611

This project is funded by the Australian Government Department of
Social Services through Relationships Australia Victoria's Forced
Adoption Support Service.



With Michele Hutchins



VANISH

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